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ABSTRACT

Bilingual immersion programs combine second language immersion for language majority children and bilingual education for language minority children. The programs are based on the underlying assumption of the immersion model: that a second language is best learned as a medium of instruction, not as the object of instruction. However, they are not sheltered as are most immersion programs, and they serve the needs of both student language groups. This kind of program draws on the natural resources existing when two language groups are mixed in the same instructional setting: the children learn each others' languages. The San Diego Title VII Spanish-English bilingual immersion program is an example that has shown consistently high student achievement for oral language development, reading, and mathematics in both languages by the completion of elementary school. Implementation of a bilingual immersion program is complex, and requires careful consideration of such issues as feasibility, target groups, parent support, teacher pre-service and in-service training, curriculum and materials adaptation, administrator and staff roles, and maintenance of language group balance. (MSE)

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INNOVATIVE SECOND LANGUAGE EDUCATION: BILINGUAL IMMERSION PROGRAMS

Marguerite Ann Snow

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University of California, Los Angeles

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Center for Language Education and Research

The Center for Language Education and Research (CLEAR) is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) to carry out a set of research and professional development activities relevant to the education of limited English proficient students and foreign language students. Located at the University of California, Los Angeles, CLEAR also has branches at the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C., Yale University, Harvard University, and the University of California, Santa Barbara.

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A basic assumption of many current second language teaching methodologies is that language instruction is more effective if the second language is not taught merely as subject matter, but rather is used as the medium of instruction for the standard school curriculum. While this content-based approach is hardly a new idea, its application has been relatively limited in instructional settings. Instead throughout most of the history of second language education in the United States, the second language has been taught as a separate school subject with emphasis on explicit teaching of the formal rules of the language. This approach was particularly common in the heyday of Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) in the 1950s and 60s and in many English as a Second Language (ESL) approaches to the education of limited English speakers.

Dissatisfaction with the ineffectiveness of these traditional approaches led to the establishment of an innovative language program in a suburb of Montreal in 1965. This program, which came to be known as the immersion model, was based on the premise that English-speaking students could receive the majority of their elementary school education through the medium of a second language (French) without retardation of first language or scholastic skills. In addition, it was hoped that the students would develop positive attitudes toward speakers of the second language (French) while maintaining positive identification as English-Canadians.

Twenty years of monitoring student progress in the first experimental program and in subsequent programs in Canada and the United States have confirmed that immersion students do indeed become functionally bilingual, and equal or surpass their monolingual peers in English language develop-

ment and scholastic achievement. Furthermore, as a consequence of the bilingual experience, immersion students develop positive attitudes toward representatives of both the target language group and toward their English heritage. During the past two decades, immersion foreign language programs have expanded rapidly across the 10 Canadian provinces and in the United States (albeit to a lesser degree). More recently, an offshoot of the traditional immersion model has attracted interest among language educators. This offshoot, referred to here as bilingual immersion, is described in greater detail in the following sections.

What is a Bilingual Immersion Program?

A bilingual immersion program employs a curricular design which shares the basic assumption of the immersion model that a second language is best learned as the medium of instruction, not as the object of instruction. Bilingual immersion programs, however, differ from the traditional immersion model in two important respects. First, a bilingual immersion program does not incorporate the "sheltered" feature of traditional immersion programs. In other words, in a bilingual immersion program second language learners are not separated from native speakers of the target language for purposes of instruction, but rather, the two language groups are purposefully mixed. Second, while immersion programs have traditionally been designed exclusively for language majority (English-speaking) students as foreign language enrichment programs, the bilingual immersion program can serve the needs of both language majority and language minority students. Thus, the language majority student receives foreign language instruction within the school setting and the language minority student benefits from the opportunity to maintain the

native or home language while concurrently acquiring a second language, English. The term bilingual immersion is used to describe the interlocking or two-way nature of this second language program. In this type of immersion program, the distinction between a foreign language program and a second language program blurs; the goal of the program is the development of bilingual proficiency for all participants.

What are the Specific Programmatic and Instructional Features of a Bilingual Immersion Program?

A good example of an elementary bilingual immersion program is the Title VII Spanish-English Language Immersion Project in the San Diego Unified School District. In San Diego, the Spanish-English bilingual immersion program was established in 1975 to provide limited English proficient (LEP) students with an opportunity to become fully bilingual in their home language, Spanish, and in their second language, English, and likewise, to provide Spanish as a second language instruction for native English speakers. The San Diego program is aptly named bilingual immersion since it incorporates a first language maintenance component as well as a second language instructional program following immersion principles.

Several interesting features of the San Diego Spanish-English bilingual immersion program should be pointed out. It is a strictly voluntary program which begins in pre-school. While the pre-school program is optional, enrollment guarantees a place in the regular elementary immersion program. A vital parent component exists in this program, ranging from parenting workshops to improve home-school communication and train parents as classroom volunteers to parent participation

on advisory committees at each school site. In pre-school through grade 3, there are separate teachers for the Spanish and English components of the curriculum. In grades 4-6 the classroom teachers have a dual Spanish-English responsibility. All teachers in the program hold bilingual certificates. Resource teachers are available to assist teachers with materials and curriculum development and student assessment and to plan pre-service and in-service workshops for the staff.

All students are expected to become "fully bilingual", in other words, to develop native-like proficiency in both Spanish and English. The linguistic composition of the classes is determined by an approximate ratio of 60% Spanish LEP students to 40% English-speaking students. More English is included in instructional time than in a traditional immersion program for language majority speakers. For instance, there are 20 minutes of oral English in pre-school, and 30 minutes in kindergarten and grade 1. English reading and language arts are presented in grades 2 and 3 for one hour; by grades 4-6 Spanish and English instructional time is equally divided in the school day. Throughout the elementary program, all students in the class receive the same Spanish and English instruction. In other words, there is no pull-out of students for certain language lessons as in some types of bilingual programs.

How Effective is the Bilingual Immersion Program in San Diego?

The Title VII Spanish-English bilingual immersion program in San Diego has longitudinal records of student achievement since 1975 (Torrance, 1982). District evaluations have shown that, on the average, project students - both LEP and English-speaking students - equal or surpass established norms for oral language development, reading, and

mathematics in both languages by completion of elementary school. Project evaluators caution, however, that the developmental sequence for language skills differs from that of traditional classes. Since the native English speakers do not receive instruction in English reading as early as do students in the district's regular elementary school programs, there is an initial lag period in first language achievement. Once English is introduced, project students make "rapid and sustained" progress in English reading (p. 183), and ultimately meet or exceed English language norms for their grade levels. Similarly, the native Spanish speakers eventually acquire English language skills that are above the norm for students in English-only or ESL instructional programs.

What are the Considerations in Implementing a Bilingual Immersion Program?

A bilingual immersion program is an ambitious undertaking, especially considering the two-way nature of the approach. Among the many practical questions which must be considered in the implementation of such a program are the following: Who is the target group that the program is primarily designed for? What is the ideal linguistic makeup of the classes? In other words, is a bilingual immersion program feasible with a class composed of many language groups, or is a homogeneous language group preferable? How much of the school curriculum, or alternatively, how little should be devoted to English language instruction?

Once a decision is made to implement a bilingual immersion program, how can the program be "sold" to parents? What can be done to insure that parents are actively involved in the program? Teachers will need pre-service and in-service training and will have to determine the extent of

curriculum and materials adaptation required by the new program. Decisions will have to be made about other personnel (e.g., aides, resource teachers) needed to offer a successful program. Still other concerns exist about how to deal with late-entering students and maintenance of the student ratio of English and non-English speakers. If the two-way program is a program within a school, what is the principal's role in creating a cooperative working environment for both the immersion and the regular program? Of more theoretical interest are questions of how interaction with native speakers actually affects language acquisition and how second language learners who are not sheltered do without benefit of linguistic adjustments and simplifications afforded them when they receive separate language instruction.

In sum, a bilingual immersion program extends the immersion model of foreign language education to meet the language needs of two distinct student populations. This type of program draws upon the natural resources which exist when two language groups are mixed in the same instructional setting; language minority children learn English from majority group children and in turn English-speakers learn the home language of the language minority children. Furthermore, while expanding their linguistic repertoire, both groups maintain their home language and succeed academically.

NOTE: The Center for Language Education and Research will conduct a survey in the 1986-87 school year which seeks to identify and describe existing bilingual immersion programs. If you can provide us with this kind of information or are interested in receiving information on our survey results, please address your inquiries to the author at:

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FURTHER READING

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Marguerite Ann Snow (Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics, University of California, Los Angeles, 1985) is a member of the professional staff of the Center for Language Education and Research at UCLA. Her main areas of interest are immersion language education, foreign language attrition, and ESL teaching methodology.